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School Resumes

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TELLING STORIES: Akinwumi Isola¹ in Translation
 "School Resumes"² Being an English Translation of Ogún Omodé From the
 Yorùbá

THREE

School Resumes

The school bell commenced ringing again one Monday morning, its tortuous peals signaling the end of our school vacation. Our versification of its cheerless, hopeless rhyme sounded something like this:

*'Ting, ting, ting
 Come to school,
 Face the lash!
 Come! Come! Come!
 Face the lash!'*

On and on it rang. Truly a personification of misfortune, that's what that bell's rhythmic din had come to represent for all of us schoolchildren. Truth be told, I loathed going to school for one and one reason alone: the strict adherence to the proverbial 'spare the rod...' policy. You know, those cane-happy teachers of ours could whip the living daylight out of the thickest hide! Imagine, the same whips-by-the-bundle we were required to carry to school were the very same ones that the teachers transformed into shredded twigs daily on our backsides. Thanks to this unrelenting practice of rigid discipline, I had become terrified of teachers far more than I was of the awesome Sango deity. And that is no lie! Teachers were like gods to us. It took a long time before I realized that they were mere mortals like everyone else. As far as I was concerned, teachers couldn't possibly be human. They couldn't possibly have necessary bodily functions like urinating that would make them human like everyone else. So, you can imagine how shocked I was one day when I accidentally stumbled upon a teacher defecating. I couldn't even imagine them having anuses like normal human beings. No, teachers were like spit fires, camouflaged, terrifying serpents, always at the ready to strike at the slightest of infractions. The approach or the mere scent of a teacher nearby was reason enough for any gathering group of pupils to scamper like startled, frightened rabbits. Frankly, the only plausible explanation for not beating a fast retreat at the sight of an approaching teacher is perhaps

if one was infirmed with an attack of guinea worms, or some such thing! No, in our eyes, teachers had to be the very pestilence capable of decimating entire populations.

Even our parents were themselves taken by teachers, holding them in high esteem. They simply worshiped them. For instance, the minute a teacher relocated from Ibadan, many of the parents would flock to greet him, giddily spreading the welcome mats with offerings of cooked meals. Sometimes, in turn, the arriving teachers would share with the elders of the farmstead the loaves of bread they had brought along with them from the city. No kidding, teachers lived high off the hog; way back then, theirs was the real good life in the rural communities.

I recall during this particular period of time I speak of, there were four teachers residing at our farmstead. There was Headmaster, whose name was L. P. Àdió, a very stern man, hard as nails, tougher than an aquatic rock. The man was so heavy-handed, it was rumored that he was capable of whipping alleged miscreants to death. An ardent believer in the proverbial 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' L. P. Àdió unabashedly subscribed to the philosophy that knowledge was to be beaten into the child. In fact, he took to telling parents that at the heart of the child was seated all manner of madness and bad behavior. He convinced them that the one and only instrument capable of ridding their darlings of these devilish behaviors was the whip. It took me a long time to realize that he got this proverbial 'nugget' from the Holy Bible. Of course, our parents firmly supported him, buying into his interpretation, lock stock and barrel. Thus, at the slightest infraction, parents would hide behind L.P. Àdió's philosophical coat tails and invoke this 'teacher-as-god' method to whip the children into shape. In no time at all, Pàdé Àdió soon took on the face of the behave-or-else-the-bogeyman behavioral model.

Then there was Assistant Principal, Habakuk Òdúsòtè, a peevish, anti-social man, who neither smiled nor ever mixed with anyone. He always appeared as if ill humored or sick, what with his timid walk and his nervous habit of constantly swallowing, making his already crooked Adam's apple dance even more awkwardly up and down. The man would thrash pupils with anything he could lay his hands on and with such impunity. What a wretched creature he was!

The third one of the lot whose name was Ségún Adéníyí was somewhat rascally; but oh, how he loved the pupils. Many, many times, he was always the one and only one who came to our rescue, protecting us from the fury of the other rod-wielding maniacs. His trouble making and wrath were always reserved for and directed at the higher-ups, none of whom he allowed to mistreat or take advantage of him. He did not try to take advantage of anyone either. A truly well-mannered gentleman he was. His handwriting on the black board was a

thing of beauty to behold. Likewise remarkable was his bent for spreading cheer to all with his sense of humor. We all loved and adored him. Of all four teachers, he was the only one who played and interacted with us.

The fourth teacher, the newly-graduated one from secondary school at Elékùró in Ibadan, was the most junior of the lot. We simply called him 'Junior Teacher.' Like the third teacher, he hardly used the switch — after all, he was himself no more than a few years older than some of the upper grade pupils. In fact, Headmaster treated him very much like an errand boy at his whim much the same way as he did the pupils. Iyiolá always boasted that he could easily take Junior Teacher down in a fight if it came to that.

Usually, at the start of a new school term, the air was always filled with tension. There always were a number of chores — grass cutting, fence mending, sweeping, floor scrubbing, as well as wood gathering for the teachers' personal use.

I recall that particular Monday, the start of a new school year. Many parents had escorted their school-age children to this opening day. Children of all shapes and sizes turned up for registration, some of them already of post-elementary age. Their parents had brought them in anyway. You know, wonders never end; just when you think you've seen it all, something else turns up. Two youths, as tall as Junior Teacher, also came to register to begin learning their 'ABC...!' It was incredible! Some of the beginners wore street clothes whose drooping sleeves they constantly adjusted, and the material grimy like the soiled work clothes of the medicine man. Some of the girls wore baggy clothes, obviously, their mothers' outfits; they looked like masqueraders. Others of the children hacked on and on, their noses clogged with thick, odorous mucus. The beginners' crowd pressed against Headmaster's table, pushing and chattering at the top of their lungs. Rural schools are a sight to behold! Many of these children sobbed inconsolably; one child in particular, clung on to her mother's leg, making it clear, even amid heaving sobs, that she had no intentions of staying in school unless her mother stayed with and sat beside her. The parents of the children rejected for admission began begging and pleading with Headmaster, while those children accepted sobbed noisily.

Headmaster had devised a clever and simple system of processing the hordes of applicants. Each child presented for admission was required to raise the right hand above the head and touch the tip of the left ear without tilting the neck. The children able to perform this test effortlessly were deemed ready candidates for the elementary class. Others whose fingertips did not touch the tip of the ears were turned away and told to return the next year. Interestingly, there were a number of children whose fingertips reached far beyond the required tip of the ear and extended as far as the shoulder. After he had made the final selection, Headmaster told the rejected candidates to return home. The entire

school buzzed noisily! Headmaster rang the first bell and, with his trademark cane in hand, appeared in the beginners' classroom. But instead of frightening the sobbing beginners into dry-eyed first-day pupils, the very sight of the cane merely pushed them to bawl even louder than before. In self defense, one of the children hurled abuses at Headmaster as he approached:

"Don't you dare touch me with that whip, you mean old man!" the youngster screamed.

Headmaster let fall his cane over the boy's head. Exactly what the boy needed to let loose a flood of pent-up tears laced with name-calling:

"You wicked old man! You mean, wicked old man. Wicked old man, you! Mother! Mother, where are you?"

To restore order to the classroom, Headmaster ordered that the wailing pupil be removed and carried outside.

We had swept clean the school in and out, grounds and all. Our next assigned chore was to fetch water from the stream for scrubbing our desks and chairs. Since the stream was some distance away, Iyiolá floated an idea: why don't we just carry our desks and chairs to the stream instead? But we needed permission from our teacher to do so. "No," Junior Teacher, our classroom teacher for the year replied, informing us that such authorization must come from Headmaster. And how do we face, let alone broach this request to Headmaster? We were petrified indeed, wondering if by asking we would incur his wrath and only give him reason to invoke the lash. We cowered behind a wall, and with our tails tucked between our legs in fright, we inched our way to Headmaster's office.

While we were still trying to muster the courage to seek Headmaster's permission, a few of our classmates had gone off already to fetch water at the stream. As we hemmed and hawed, rehearsing our opening lines, Headmaster appeared suddenly. We bolted, despite his command to us to halt. What were we doing, lurking behind the wall? He queried. We made our request, which he surprisingly granted without the slightest bit of hesitation. He could care less how we accomplished the task, just as long as we got it done properly, period, was his response.

We were elated! We carried our desks and headed straight to the stream, gathering en route, the abrasive leaves of the *ficus* tree with which to scrub the desks. Many other pupils who saw us followed our lead.

Iyiolá showed us a thing or two at the stream on that Monday morning. I was the first to complete the task. It was a roughshod job at best, but I was satisfied. Quickly, Iyiolá followed suit. He too completed the task, and the two of us began chasing each other around the edge of the pond. Next one to finish scrubbing her desk was a girl named Folásadé. She joined Iyiolá and me in our chasing game, ignoring our warning that she back off. Instead, this girl ran

between me and Iyiolá as we chased each other round and round the stream, or rather, a stream half of which appeared to have already dried up. I was in front, Sadé was in the middle, and Iyiolá brought up the rear. The game was a simple one: run, jump across ditches, and continue running. In the middle of the game, we came across an unusually deep ditch whose bottom was filled with mud. Iyiolá and I were no stranger to this part of the pond; we had always leapt over this very same ditch many times without incident. As soon as I reached it, I cleared its width as before. When Sadé reached the same spot, she froze, refusing to move and thus blocking Iyiolá's access in the narrow foot path. "Either jump or move out of the way!" Iyiolá screamed at Sadé, signaling his imminent approach from behind, but Sadé began to cower awkwardly like a pathetic coward trying to kill a snake. Iyiolá was ticked off! I stood aside, watching from the other side, laughing my head off.

It appeared Sadé was finally making an effort, but as she was bracing herself for the leap with one faltering step after another, Iyiolá had reached and pushed her from behind, thinking a little shove might boost her confidence and do the trick. Alas! Disaster struck instead. The minute Iyiolá gave the unexpected push, the rock beneath Sadé's foot gave way, and 'splat!' down she plunged into the depths of the muddy pit! All the desk-scrubbing pupils screamed with fright.

"Good God, you've killed someone's child, you've killed someone's child," the cry went up.

Who knew the mud was truly deep? Sadé had fallen and landed on her back. Instinctively, she tried to struggle to an upright position only to find her feet sinking deeper and deeper into the mud. A mere fall, we thought at first, but it became clear that the thick mud was slowly pulling in Sadé inch by inch! She let out blood-cuddling screams.

"Oh, my God, I'm drowning! I'm drowning! Save me! Somebody, please save me! Please don't let me perish," she wailed.

What bad luck! Unfortunately, there was absolutely no way Iyiolá or I could find access to the bottom of the hole. We circled swiftly to the middle of the pond but the water prevented any possible outlet to the muddy hole that was slowly, steadily sucking her in.

In response to Sadé's distress calls, the farmers from the farms nearby and others in the vicinity of the pond had gathered within minutes. By now, she was already waist deep in the muddy muck! Her cry for help, now more distressing, continued unabated. Iyiolá attempted a rescue plan by gingerly picking his way along the pond's dangerous bank. But just as he was about to reach Sadé, he lost his footing, and down he went, plunged headlong into the pond. His vigorous swim to escape did nothing to help the situation except stir up the silt from the bottom of the still waters of the pond. Sadé was now belly

deep in this quicksand-like muddy hole. The women gathered wailed in fright and confusion.

“What calamity... May God save us!” they prayed.

By now, a huge crowd had gathered. One elderly man called down to Sadé, and instructed her to hold as still as she possibly could; otherwise, he advised, the harder she struggled, the faster the mud would continue to suck her under.

Swiftly, a palm-nut harvester had brought in a ladder of sorts, which he extended and lowered into the pit. But the ladder rested mainly on the sodden end of the pit and kept sinking farther and farther down; definitely the footing made it unfit to climb. By now Sadé had sunk in chest deep!

Sheer providential intervention it was that planted the feet of a lumberjack, with cable and all, on the path to the pond! The rescuers quickly made a slip knot in the cord and gently lowered it down to Sadé, instructing her to slip it over her head, pull her arms through and ensure that it is firmly placed around her chest and under her armpits. Promptly, Sadé followed their instructions to the letter. Then, three burly men began pulling her up and out. It goes without saying that she was covered in thick mud. As soon as she emerged, the crowd, giddy with excitement and gratitude, let out a loud noise!

Iyiolá and I had cleverly planted ourselves strategically, a few yards from the crowd, knowing full well Sadé would announce to all that we had pushed her, and the elders present would inevitably take action. True enough, no sooner had her feet touched solid ground than she began screaming:

“Thank you. Ah, thank you for saving my life. It’s Iyiolá’s fault. He pushed me into the pit,” she announced emphatically.

“And where is the wicked child?” they all asked, looking around. The other pupils pointed in our direction. An elderly man beckoned to us:

“Come here...! Yes, you, come here, right now!” the man bellowed. While he repeated himself, Iyiolá and I turned tail and bolted from the pond. We stood afar from the crowd as if we weren’t a part of it. We certainly were not going to stand for double punishment, knowing full well what awaited us at school. So, why stick around here at the pond for a duplicate judgment from the witnesses’ court?

Immediately, they stripped Sadé naked down to her underwear, rinsed out her dress, bathed her, and massaged the sprained ankle that made her hobble. One of the women loaned her a shawl to cover her bosom until her dress dried out.

Iyiolá and I now contemplated our next move. We knew without a doubt that the matter would be reported to the authorities who, inevitably, will take drastic measures in meting out stiff punishment. We then picked up our still damp desks and headed back to school. When we returned, we left our desks out in the sun to dry. Unbeknown to me, Iyiolá had been massaging a scheme

of sorts, but had not shared it with me. We both had been fully aware of the inevitability of punishment, no question. Iyiolá informed me he was going to the lavatory to urinate. It was a lie to cover up his impending escape. In fact, the blockhead had returned home via a short cut. He wanted to postpone the punishment to another day. Bound to find an empty house – with his father at the farm and his mother gone to market — Iyiolá grabbed a mat and went off to sleep.

Right after Iyiolá made his escape, the pond-side crowd arrived at the school. Sadé and her friends headed directly to Headmaster’s office. During this time, I whiled away the time in play with Dolápò, Àkánmú and a few other pupils who hadn’t gone with us to the pond, but had heard the story of what had happened, minus the part about Iyiolá being the one who pushed Sadé into the muddy ditch. When I saw Iyiolá leave to go home, I had a hunch that it was a ploy. The rascal had no fever. For my part, I was determined not to run. The part about us playing together before she fell into the ditch was true, but she most certainly cannot hang on me the lie about me pushing her into that ditch.

Sadé was still telling her story to Headmaster, when the lumberjack arrived at the school and matched straight to Headmaster’s office intent on filling up his ear:

“Sir, you know, this is the first day of your new school year. May God keep all manner of evil from us all. Whenever you send any of these pupils to the pond for whatever reason, it is imperative that you send along a teacher to supervise them. They are just kids. Thanks to the hand of Providence, the farmers working nearby, and the men and women at the pond today; otherwise, this young girl would have breathed her last at the pond today. And it was none other than her peers who pushed her in. You should know that there are lots of mischievous children running about,” he finished.

“Well, I thank you very much, Sir,” Headmaster acknowledged. “I am quite grateful for the critical assistance you provided in helping us ward off disaster today. For that we are most grateful. However, I’m afraid it’s not your place to give us advice that we have teachers supervise the kids’ every activity. You cannot come here to teach us how to do our job,” Headmaster said flatly, firmly.

“Listen,” the lumberjack replied, matching the firmness of Headmaster’s voice, “I can teach you your job when obviously you have not learned to do it well. The one to whom we entrust the care of our children should ensure unfailingly that they do not run around aimlessly. Sending children to the pond, unsupervised, is the height of irresponsibility. I’m sure none of their mothers would dare send them on errands to such risky places. It will take a tragedy one of these days before you learn your lesson, I suppose.”

Headmaster was enraged by now, and ordered the old man out of his

office forthwith! But the old man threw back the threat in Headmaster's face:

"I dare you to kick me out. If you call yourself a true born son of your father, you may come and throw me out of here," he warned.

Everyone had gathered closer to the office as soon as the lumberjack first appeared on the school grounds. Headmaster ordered a few of the burly boys from among the onlookers to throw the old man out, but talk was one thing and action was another matter. The old man stood his ground, daring any of the burly pupils who was "ready to cause his mother premature tears of grief," as he put it, to come forward. A few of those boys who had advanced towards him suddenly found themselves dazed and lethargic. Headmaster stood up, ready to do the job himself, but before he could reach in front of the old man, the teachers present had deftly stepped between them. They pleaded with the old man to leave in peace and go about his business.

Finally, the old man acquiesced, and with each step he took, the more Headmaster ranted and raved, refusing to be appeased, his chest heaving with anger.

"No, no, I must show this man what a busy body he is, a tale bearer of the first order, indeed. I will see to it that the authorities arrest and teach him a lesson in keeping his nose out of other people's affairs. How daring of him! What cheek to enter *my* school and dare to question *my* authority and governance! I'll show him. *Alright.*"³

The teachers kept imploring him to calm down, even as he fumed and fussed, vowing to teach "these crude yokels a lesson or two," as he put it. In response, the elderly man threw back his own invectives at Headmaster as he walked away.

"If you call yourself a true born son of your mother and father, I dare you to come after me, and I'll show you why chickens don't piss," he threatened.

As the uproar gradually died down and a semblance of order was restored, Headmaster summoned to his office all those who had gone to the pond to scrub their desks. Each one told his or her story until, finally, every account pointed to three main players: Iyiolá, me, and Sadé.

Sadé's account of the incident went something like this:

As she walked the path along the side of the pond, Iyiolá came from behind and *deliberately* pushed her into the pond because she, supposedly, did not move out of his way fast enough. Then she hastened to add that I not only witnessed it all, but that I did so by standing there and laughing throughout her ordeal.

When it was my turn to speak, I confirmed that indeed Iyiolá and I did walk not run around the edge of the pond after we had finished scrubbing our desks and were waiting for them to dry. I told Headmaster that neither Iyiolá nor I had invited Sadé to walk with us and that she had joined us on her own

volition, planting herself between the two of us. I was in front, I admitted, and, frankly, couldn't tell for sure whether or not Iyiolá had indeed pushed Sadé. I only heard and saw her fall. I barely had gotten out the last few words before Sadé interrupted, yelling at the top of her voice: "Liar! It's a lie!" Instinctively, Headmaster raised his cane but, on second thought, brought it back down without letting it fall on Sadé's head. Headmaster's policy was simple: no one shall interrupt another's account in his presence without his permission. He sternly warned Sadé to watch such infractions, which would have been severely punished were it not for the traumatic experience she had just been through. Otherwise, Headmaster said, his whip would have let Sadé know "in whose presence you are standing."

Headmaster asked about Iyiolá, but then remembered that he had taken ill suddenly and had been permitted to go home. Then again, the boy might have faked his forged illness, Headmaster nodded knowingly. So he instructed four burly boys to go and carry Iyiolá from home back to school. My, you know, there were some burly boys in that school, no kidding! There were those like Sábíù, son of the butcher; he was not only taller than Headmaster, but could also easily take him down in a tussle. Rumor had it that Sábíù was already married, yet he was only in class four. Then there was also Hezekiah Adéníjì, a.k.a. '*Abs-of-Steel*.' The man-boy had been going solo hunting long before this time I'm speaking of. I cannot begin to count the number of such senior-beginners-of-the-alphabet men-boys in that school.

In the meantime, while the search for Iyiolá was going on, Headmaster gave me my punishment. As instructed two burly boys lifted me in to the prone position, one grabbed both arms, the other both feet. Headmaster laid nine lashes on my buttocks. I cried out in such anguish. When the two boys let go of me, they literally did so at the same time, causing me to fall flat on my stomach.

Curiously, we saw neither hide nor hair of the bouncers who had been sent to track down Iyiolá and carry him back to school. Wouldn't you know it, the rascal had gone into hiding in the rafters as soon as he sensed they were out looking for him? The bouncers searched and searched everywhere they could possibly imagine he'd be to no avail; worse yet, there was nobody at home to give them information on his whereabouts. But just as they were about to give up the search and return to school, Hezekiah *Abs-of-Steel* told his bouncer partner that he thought he had heard some noise coming from the rafters. When he climbed the rafters, behold, there he found Iyiolá crouched, clinging to a beam.

"Easy; take it easy on me, and please let me climb down gently, on my own," he pleaded.

But just as his feet were about to touch the ground, he jumped down and headed for the door, ready to bolt. However, before he could reach the

doorway, one of the bouncers grabbed his arm. The muscular men carried him back to school amid much noise and jeers.

Headmaster went on and on about Iyiolá's unruly behavior and bad character on account of his habitual run-in with the school authorities. He would make an example of him to serve as a deterrent to others, Headmaster promised.

More than anything else, I think this making him 'a deterrent-to-others' talk was what frightened Iyiolá. As Headmaster was beginning to pull out and line up his bundles of whips, Iyiolá cast about furtively, and briefly and made a mad dash for window. Before anyone could bat an eye, presto! The willful Iyiolá had already scaled the window sill and taken to his heels! The musclemen's chase was almost as instinctive and immediate as Iyiolá's escape was anticipated. Iyiolá sped toward the graveyard bordering the school grounds, rustling the leaves of the canna plants as he dodged the outstretched arms of his pursuers. It became a game of cat and mouse. Just when it appeared the bouncers would catch him, Iyiolá would sprightly duck away from their outstretched arms. The chaos lasted a very long time. Eventually, they captured and brought back an exhausted Iyiolá. Headmaster gave him twelve hard lashes, but it did not faze Iyiolá one bit; it did not even draw a single teardrop from his eyes! He just merely rubbed his palm hard on his butt to ease the pain.

Perhaps what surprised me most about the whole incident was that even after all the pain and punishment, Iyiolá and Sadé soon became fast friends shortly thereafter.

During that year, Mr. Habakuk Òdúsòtè served as our classroom teacher. Iyiolá and I were in the same class of not more than sixteen pupils. All of the age-appropriate lessons for the grade were taught to us by Mr. Òdúsòtè, who not only had very little teaching skills or ability and was also quite short tempered.

For instance, one day he was teaching us arithmetic, naming so many words and concepts which we hadn't seen nor heard of before. We were clueless. His word-math went something like this: "If one glove costs 0.72,4 how many gloves can be purchased for 42.97 $\frac{1}{2}$?"

He then followed that with a lecture on poster art, during which Iyiolá raised his hand and asked him what a glove was. Mr. Òdúsòtè told him to shut up and complete the math problem he had assigned him. I, too, asked if there was much difference between poster art paper and exercise book paper. Our instructor said if I had any brains at all, I would have figured out that there was no difference whatsoever. "Paper is paper," was his curt answer. That put-down shut me up fast. He had continued the lesson, trying to explain a word-math problem to us thus: one person went from Birmingham to Coventry, some 28 kilometers away. If it took him five minutes to walk 1 kilometer, and he started out at exactly 9:17 a.m., at what time would he arrive at his destination? At the

end of this math lesson, our instructor asked if we had any questions. Promptly, Iyiolá raised his hand, rose to his feet, and asked:

"Excuse me, Sir, would you kindly tell us in what parts of the world these countries you mentioned are. Also, I would like to know how far in miles Arúnlógún is from Fidíti."

"Sit down!" Mr. Òdúsòtè thundered. "If you had any brains, when you heard 'Coventry,' shouldn't you have known that that is in England? Do you think I'm a surveyor that you dare ask me the number of miles Arúnlógún is from Fidíti? Do you think mathematicians use such insignificant rural towns to compute complex mathematical problems and concepts? You dunce! If there are no more worthwhile questions, then you all need to keep your damn mouths shut!"

During lunch recess, we all agreed that when our teacher did not know the answer to the questions we asked, his trick was to resort to equivocation and then become quarrelsome to boot, like the toad that no longer knew how to find its way to the stream but turns its confusion into an opportunity for self-commendation.

Mr. Òdúsòtè's odd way of dressing was quite comical. Most noticeable are those baggy, badly-fitted trousers of his — always flapping with the slightest breeze like sails on a mast. Like the poser that he was, his shirts and trousers were imitations, fakes made of poor quality fabric, all wrinkled and static-ridden and stuck to his body. Instead of a belt, he used a neck-tie or sash-like fabric to hold up his drooping trousers high above his belly button. His generally ill-fitting, oversized dress shirts and sack-like billowy trousers cut a most comical, slovenly figure. Hence, the moniker, *Scruffy Duds* or *Odibos*, the nickname we always called him behind his back.

Soon after lunch recess, we began our lesson in World Geography. We were on the topic of sheep and wool production worldwide.

"Wool is used to manufacture thick and warm clothing for use in extremely cold climates. Trousers worn by modern-day young men and boys are made from wool blends," Mr. Òdúsòtè lectured.

He pointed out wool-producing regions on the map he drew on the board. Once again he paused to take our questions.

Iyiolá again was the first to raise his hand to ask Mr. Òdúsòtè a question:

"Pardon me, Sir, do you mind pointing out places where cheap clothing imitations, you know, 'odibos' are manufactured."

Apparently, he had sensed that our nicknames, '*Scrappy Duds*' and '*Odibos*,' referred to him on account of the cheap quality fabric and the garishness of his fashion statement, even though none of us had ever called him either of these names to his face. The fact that we all bust out laughing at

Iyiolá's facetious request was bound to have confirmed his suspicion. In any case, the man's bloodshot and foreboding eyes stemmed our laughter, instantly. You could hear a pin drop. It was a case of tail wagging dogs in the company of a rabid dog. Calmly and calculatedly, he responded to Iyiolá's question with deadly scorn: "I would say, in your family's manufacturing shed; yes, *cheap clothing imitations*, *Odibos*, are manufactured in the factory located right there in your father's house!"

Again, peals of laughter filled the air, especially since the word "*odibos*" dropped from the very lips of the intended bearer. Yet again, Òdúsòtè's fiendish, piercing look cut short our mocking laughter.

"I have spent my precious time trying to teach you well, but what do you do? You spend your time mocking all your relations even though you think you're mocking me. You, Iyiolá, get the hell out of my classroom, right *now*!" Mr. Òdúsòtè bellowed, quite irate!

Iyiolá, now repentant for the moment, began begging and pleading:

"Ah, please Sir, I beg you Sir. I really wasn't trying to mock you; I was just simply asking a question. After all, you aren't wearing '*odibus*' clothing. How could I dare insinuate?" Iyiolá tried to fake-talk his way out of being thrown out of class without much luck.

As was the case twice earlier, the class had burst into a fit of laughter when Iyiolá mentioned the word '*odibus*.' By now, Òdúsòtè was incensed. He kicked the entire lot of us out of the classroom. As punishment for our frivolity and inattentiveness, we were sentenced to hand weed the patch of wild grass around the classroom.

With every weed we pulled, we each gave Iyiolá an angry earful, schooling him in the art of asking appropriate and relevant questions. Our older classmates grumbled incessantly, reminding Iyiolá and other mischief makers that they were in school to learn, and will not allow some prankster to fritter away their time in this fashion. Needless to say, we served our hand-weeding sentence noisily enough to attract Headmaster's attention. When he beckoned to us, I quickly ran up to him; and as soon as he asked what the class was doing outside and why, I told him our teacher was angry because we had laughed during our lesson and were serving our punishment by hand weeding the assigned section of the nearby lawn around the school building.

"And what caused the laughter?" Headmaster asked.

"We were talking about '*odibos*,' Sir" I replied.

Rather confused by my response, Headmaster sent me to inform Mr. Òdúsòtè to appear before him. Within minutes, Mr. Òdúsòtè and I were standing before Headmaster; I was dismissed, but rather than return to join the others on the field, I crouched under a windowsill by a wall to eavesdrop.

"What infraction warranted throwing out the entire class of kids?" Headmaster began.

"Sir, that Iyiolá boy is a hooligan, a very bad influence indeed. He got the rest of the class into trouble. I was giving a world geography lesson, showing them on a map where sheep are raised and wool produced worldwide. After my lecture, I called for questions, and Iyiolá asked where *cheap clothing imitations* are manufactured, you know, *odibos*," Òdúsòtè explained.

" '*Odibos* ' ? What on earth does '*odibos* ' mean? " Headmaster asked curiously.

"Shabby, worn out, inferior clothing; you know, clothing made from imitation fabrics that billow with the slightest breeze," our teacher struggled.

"Okay, and what's the relevance of that to your lesson on sheep-raising and wool production?" Headmaster asked, quite confused.

"Sir, you know, I have suspected for some time now that the students call me '*Odibos*' in reference to my choice of fashion and the clothes I wear," our teacher replied sort of sheepishly.

Before he could catch himself, Headmaster had let slip a roaring laugh. He laughed and laughed, almost choking on his apology to Òdúsòtè.

"Forgive me, Òdúsòtè; I'm not laughing at you, really. But your story is too hilarious for words," Headmaster tried to explain between chuckles.

"Each time I walk past, I hear them whisper the words, '*Wannabe Dandy Odibos*.' Usually, they simply say, '*Odibos*.' I came to suspect that the derogation was directed at me, since I hear it every single time I walk past them."

"So, this boy, Iyiolá, has he ever called you this name to your face?" Headmaster asked curiously.

"Er, not exactly, Sir. But, of course, you know he wouldn't dare say such a thing to my face. He's rather surreptitious about it," Teacher assured Headmaster.

"If one should cast aspersions at the King and offer heartfelt apologies thereafter, the King forgives, doesn't he? In my opinion, the kids' behaviour does not merit such drastic measures. Besides, before kicking every pupil out of the classroom, you ought to have run it by me oughtn't you? I thought I had made that clear. It is I who ultimately must answer to the authorities should anything happen to any of those children. Would you please call them all back into the classroom. I want you to do so *immediately* rather than later," Headmaster lectured, trimming Òdúsòtè down to size.

I scampered from my hiding place back to join my classmates at our weeding patch. They all gathered around me as I reported to them all I had heard Headmaster say, emphasizing especially the part about our teacher calling us back to the classroom immediately.

As soon as we entered the classroom, we sat quietly at our desks. Our teacher also sat silently at his desk for a while. And then he arose, adjusted his drooping trousers, and began speaking:

“Had I not felt sorry for you all, I would’ve let you stay put out there weeding for good. When Headmaster heard about your mischievous behavior, he was appalled and wanted to take more drastic measures to punish your transgressions and dismiss Iyiolá from school, but I appealed to him, pleading for mercy on your behalf. I go out of my way to care for you, but are you even grateful enough to show any appreciation for the one who has had your best interests at heart?”

When my classmates heard Òdúsòtè’s version of his encounter with Headmaster, they all turned their knowing gaze on me, but I looked straight ahead and betrayed nothing. Our knowing gaze said it all: Òdúsòtè had sugar-coated the incident. Even so, we and Òdúsòtè tried to avoid any kind of further collision from then on.

In fact, it appeared that after this incident, our teacher sort of began to warm up toward Iyiolá, realizing that he could minimize conflict in the classroom if he and Iyiolá were on friendlier terms. There was no doubt that Iyiolá’s trouble making can truly test a teacher’s mettle. The next day, Òdúsòtè pulled all the stops. I suspect he was trying to show off his garish wardrobe and ‘wannabe’ fashion tastes, such as they were, and throw off as contrary our derogatory label of his fake dandy fashion. Whatever the reason, he certainly came to school, intent on proving the point that he can indeed wear whatever he pleases. But, Lord have mercy, he looked every bit the clown in this humongous tie that was the size of a woman’s shawl. To begin with, the collar of his shirt was obviously oversized, making his thin neck look like a wooden spoon lost in a small pot. His polo shirt was several sizes too big, making the knot of the tie bunch up like a ruffled bow that rested half way down his chest. He looked such a sight that the other teachers quietly mocked him under their breath. I even heard Mr. Ségún Adéníyí tease him about his uncoordinated outfit:

“My, my, my, don’t you look dandy in that tie. Yes, Sir! Wow, check out those thunder trousers of yours!”

I’d wager there was yardage enough to produce quite easily two additional, full length pairs of trousers. The shirt’s sleeves were far too long, way past his fingertips, causing him to pull them back constantly. He complimented this black-pants-on-white-shirt outfit with white socks and red shoes.

The moment we began our lesson, our teacher strolled up and down, going from row to row, desk to desk. When he reached Iyiolá’s desk, Iyiolá blurted out: “Wow, this is some outfit you’ve got on today, Sir. What’s the occasion? And what an unusual tie! I bet those itinerant hawkers must have come calling on the farmstead recently.”

“Now, there you go again. Nothing ever passes your notice without your mouthy comment, does it? Always pushing the boundary,” Teacher

countered. Then turning to me, he warned:

“You, I know you run around with this clown. You’d better watch your association with him lest he corrupts and gets you into trouble. He is a very bad influence!”

Had the grass-weeding incident and Headmaster’s tongue-lashing not taken place, Òdúsòtè would have let his whip do the talking. For a short while thereafter, we enjoyed our schoolwork and assignments without the constant threat of the lash. However, it took less than a month before our teacher once again resorted to letting his whip and not his mouth speak.

When the whipping sessions began to get out of hand, we devised all sorts of tricks to minimize the pain of the cane. For instance, Sábíù suggested that bare hands that once carried live toads never feel the sting of the whip; we tried carrying live toads with bare hands to no avail. Many pupils resorted to that trick of the ‘layered shorts,’ that is, wearing two or three shorts one over the other to ensure padded buttocks. Others cut and wore pieces of cardboard under their shorts. One other trick we all tried was to meet the downward arc of the cane midway to minimize its impact, its sting. But this trick ended up irritating our tutors more than it helped minimize our pain.

One day, *Abs-of-Steel* shared with us an anti-sting antidote he claimed someone had taught him. He described the workings of the antidote thus: if after a beating one rubbed a kernel of corn over the welt or broken skin, and then one planted the kernel inside an ant hill, the growing kernel would have the effect of causing the hand of the punishing instructor to swell each time. Of course, we tried it too, to no avail. But *Abs-of-Steel*’s explanation for the medicine’s inefficacy was simply that in such cases of failure the offending teacher was simply too heavy-handed for the medicine to work!

There was one thing though to the credit of *Abs-of-Steel* for which we were all grateful. Seasoned son of a hunter that he was, he had been bathed in protective charms from birth. His father had enwrapped him with anti-venom serum such that no asp on earth could ever harm him. Almost a genetic medicine this was, for every generation born to their household was awash at birth in this portion, in protection against the dangers of the family’s life long hunting vocation. In the event that he accidentally stepped on a snake in the bush, the snake, and not him, would die. *Abs-of-Steel* could pick up a live snake with his bare hands and not feel endangered. For instance, one morning, on their way to school, *Abs-of-Steel* and his fellow pupils saw a snake, a rather large, deadly asp. As if possessed, *Abs-of-Steel* chased this creature into a farm over row after row of freshly-prepared garden beds. The other pupils pleaded with him to turn back, but their entreaties fell on deaf ears. *Abs-of-Steel* returned to join them only after he had captured it, alive. Of course, he was already fully protected and the dangerous snake was impotent in his grasp. The asp writhed and struggled

to free itself while *Abs-of-Steel* tried to stuff the reptile into the pocket of his shorts. At last, he contained the struggling snake and secured the opening of his pocket tightly with a rope. Naturally, he and his buddies were tardy to school that morning. When they arrived, *Abs-of-Steel* pulled me aside to fill me in on what had transpired to make them tardy.

"So, what do you intend to do with the snake?" I asked, not quite believing him.

"Oh, I just want to frighten our teacher, you know, rattle him a little bit," *Abs-of-Steel* replied matter-of-factly.

Frankly, at first I thought he couldn't be serious about harboring a snake in his pocket, until he told me to place my hand over the bulging pocket. I did, and got the fright of my life when I felt the form of the bulging content of his pocket. All he said in response to my disquiet was, "you just hide and watch." We all trooped to assembly as we did daily, forming our lines by grades for general inspection by the teachers. The teachers began the inspection, checking our appearance, especially our clothing and ejecting from the line for corporal punishment those pupils who were unkempt and/or whose outfits were dirty. When our teacher reached *Abs-of-Steel*, he shook his head and hissed in disgust.

"My, you sure are filthy. Did you roll in cow dung or something?" he sneered.

Truth be told, Teacher was right. *Abs-of-Steel* looked extremely filthy — all dusty and caked with mud in places, what with his relentless pursuit of that snake in the farm patch shortly before the inspection during this morning assembly.

Promptly, Mr. Òdúsòtè grabbed his whip; *Abs-of-Steel* was to be his first candidate that morning. He instructed *Abs-of-Steel* to prepare his buttocks to receive the whip's first sting. *Abs-of-Steel* only pulled his pants on tightly instead of tautly as was required. Mr. Òdúsòtè noticed and would not be duped.

"I said pull your shorts taut," he repeated.

"Please Sir, I beg you. Please, Sir," *Abs-of-Steel* pleaded for mercy.

"Look, I'll have the bouncers hold you up by your hands and feet..." Teacher threatened impatiently.

"Please Sir, I'm begging you, Sir..." *Abs-of-Steel* kept repeating. When it appeared *Abs-of-Steel* was stalling, Teacher moved in to pull taut the shorts himself. He grabbed one side of *Abs-of-Steel's* shorts, the side that housed the coiled snake, not noticing the protruding pocket. In the ensuing push and pull, *Abs-of-Steel* had deftly untied the string with which he had secured the evil charge in his pocket! Out slithered the snake, and began to coil itself on to Òdúsòtè's forearm. Òdúsòtè screamed, yelling: "Death. This is death. Oh, my God, Death has grabbed a hold of me today!"

He jumped up high and bolted as fast as he could. There was so much

commotion everywhere. Mr. Òdúsòtè sprinted like a maniac across the field. The pupils too ran helter-skelter. It was pure pandemonium!

While we all ran about screaming our heads off, *Abs-of-Steel* had calmly, deftly and swiftly grabbed a hold of the snake once more before anyone could see him do so. The trouble was that no one knew where the reptile was. But of course, as we ran around in panic at the sight of the snake coiled around Òdúsòtè's forearm, *Abs-of-Steel* had ensured that the snake did not fall to the ground. He had quickly stuffed it back into his pocket and had run to the latrine, where he killed and disposed of it in the latrine pit. He then returned to join the panic dance the entire school was engaged in. A few of the pupils left the school and escaped to the safety of their homes.

Gradually, the panic subsided. Headmaster summoned an assembly with a ring of the bell. Everyone picked their way gingerly, darting nervous glances about on the ground and around them, all asking the same question: "Have they killed it? Have they killed it yet?"

The brave hearts who didn't run too far away assured the more timid minded of the snake's disappearance. Conjecture filled the air. Some said it had disappeared into and was roaming the classrooms. Others claimed they saw it in the field. Yet others believed it had chased after Mr. Òdúsòtè. But a few people swore they had seen *Abs-of-Steel* holding it.

We had all assembled, but Mr. Òdúsòtè was visibly absent.

"Where could he be? Outside, maybe? Where else could he have gone to?" We all wondered.

Mr. Ségún Adeniyi offered to go search for him at his home. He took along with him two burly boys, and I volunteered to go with them. When we reached Òdúsòtè's house, we found all the windows and doors were tightly secured. Surely, he couldn't be inside his house with the doors and windows so tightly shut, we reasoned. Who would've guessed that that scoundrel had locked himself up in his bedroom, where he sat, panicked and out of breath? We knocked on the door. Mr. Adeniyi tried calling out his name to which a tiny voice from within answered, asking: "Have they caught and killed it? Have they killed it yet?"

We assured him that the creature had been disposed of to coax him to at least come out of hiding. He emerged at last to Ségún Adeniyi's loud laughter and mild ribbing.

"Oh, for goodness sake, Mr. Òdúsòtè, well, well...carrying on like this on account of an ordinary snake! Wow, you sure gave manhood a bad name today!" Adeniyi teased.

"Hmmm, that an ordinary snake, you called that an ordinary snake, eh? One is about to thrash a pupil, and a snake suddenly emerges and coils itself on one's arm! An ordinary snake you call that, eh? In my book, I call that an evil messenger sent to do me harm," our teacher panted.

"Well then, but you could at least have waited around to help kill it. Of what use was running away and hiding? What did that accomplish?" Adeniyi pressed.

"Wait around to help kill it? Are you kidding me? And with what was I to help kill it? The measly whip in my hand, the same hand around which the evil creature had coiled itself? No, no, there was no way I was going to hang around once I had flung it away from my wrist. I knew if I had stayed around, it would have come directly after me, since it was an evil messenger sent to do me harm," Òdúsòtè replied, quite agitated.

"It's okay now. All is calm. Let's return to school," Ségún coaxed.

The minute we reached the school, Òdúsòtè wanted to know what had happened to the snake. "Where is the snake? I must burn the evil creature," he announced. Only then was he told honestly that no one knew exactly the whereabouts of the creature. That was reason enough for him to turn and try to flee again. He jumped up casting about nervously. His fellow teachers snickered and coaxed him not to run away again.

"You know, this situation is fraught with danger. A snake still lurking in the rafters while one sleeps? That is serious! Who among you knows where the snake is now?" Òdúsòtè asked.

"Frankly, I think the snake has escaped. Snakes, you know, are afraid of humans and rarely stick around, really" Headmaster informed him.

"That may be true of ordinary snakes, Sir, but not unlike one which is sent specifically on a mission to harm. Perhaps we should ask Hezekiah what the deal is," Òdúsòtè added, imploringly.

"I do not know either. I don't know the origin or meaning of the snake's appearance. Now, how would I have concealed a snake, a live one at that, in my pocket? I, too, am befuddled by the whole episode," *Abs-of-Steel* was quick to answer the query and dispel any and all myths about his conjuration powers.

"Is it true that you picked it up with your bare hands as it tried to escape?" Headmaster asked *Abs-of-Steel*.

"No, Sir," *Abs-of-Steel* denied flatly, adding rather straight-faced that he had tried to kill it only to watch it vanish before his very eyes into the bush. Headmaster was nonplussed, truly stumped for words. He dismissed the assembly, ordering all of us back to our classes. We all agreed that the snake incident could very well have been a mission of harm as Òdúsòtè had believed, because the rest of us were befuddled by it all – Could this be nothing more than mysteries befuddling to the novice being revealed only to the initiated?

From that day hence, our teacher had desisted from laying the whip on *Abs-of-Steel*. From the beginning to the end of the week, Òdúsòtè entered the classroom, gingerly and would carefully examine the chair and under the

table before sitting down. In like manner, the students, the females in particular, were on pins and needles. All one had to say when they congregated in one spot is, "hey look, what's that?" or start the hissing "ssss..." sound, to get them jumping and scampering for dear life. It wasn't too long before the mystery of the strange snake was revealed to the entire student body; the instructors were non-the wiser. Isn't it unusually the case that the one whose business is most affected is always the last to know about it? (66)

Eliminate corporal punishment from our school experience and the curriculum was a real delight. I truly enjoyed every subject we studied with the exception of English language dictation. That was truly my nemesis, my downfall. As a subject the English language was quite confusing to me. You hear it one way, but must write it down a different way. Quite inconsistent and idiosyncratic; it was unlike Yoruba. This English language was the one subject we studied the most. Dictation was indeed my Achilles heel. Every dictation lesson error was subtracted from the total number of words given. The total number of errors made constituted the total number of cane lashes one received. One day, out of twenty dictation words, I got only nine correct, which meant the eleven incorrectly spelled words cost me eleven lashes of the cane.

Ah, those teachers lived the good life at the farmsteads. They considered no errand or chore too small, big, or dangerous to send the pupils to do. It's no secret that they shared amongst themselves and used for their personal cooking needs the weekly supplies of firewood they required us to bring to school. Depending on the season, they'd ask for yams, dug from our fathers' farms. During the rainy season, under the pretext of giving us lessons on the various species of the snail, they'd require that we each bring in half a dozen snails. Many times, they had even asked that we each bring to school a cupful of red hot peppers for the teachers' wives' soup pots.

Then there was the subject of arts and crafts, which wasn't taught at school. Instead of hands-on crafts, we were to purchase and bring to school ready-made craft items. On arts and crafts days, we carried to school items such as brooms, woven baskets, and fowl-coops which we merely turned in for a grade. Of course, the larger or prettier the object presented, the higher the points we earned. No one cared to know the origin of these crafts. At examination times, I always made sure I purchased and submitted items for high marks. To have done otherwise would have ensured low marks. On farming days, the teachers always sent us on many and various errands. Some were sent off snail hunting and gathering, while others of us were deployed to gather firewood. As the saying goes, the wind moves the forest in whatever direction it pleases. Inevitably, one's superior will send or make one do whatever tasks he wishes. Undoubtedly, we were at the whim and caprices of those teachers.

One day, I was among the group assigned to snail hunt. Indeed

Providence smiled on me on that day. It was a rather wet day, quite damp throughout. We all foraged about in the woods, our garments literally drenched from the heavy dew drops falling from the dense foliage. After we emerged from one thickly-wooded area, we came upon a farm newly cultivated for planting. We wanted to have a bit of rest. So I mindlessly perched on a large mound of gathered leaves and weeds nearby. Feeling something tickle the soles of my feet ever so slightly, I raised one leg up to see what it was. Suddenly, what greeted my gaze was a long snake emerging from beneath the pile of weeds. Thanks to Providence, I was saved from the bite of this very poisonous snake. To say I was a nervous wreck all day long until I reached home was putting it mildly. And can you believe that, for all the danger to which I was exposed all day long, one tiny snail was the only trophy I could claim to my name. While some of my class mates banked six snails, others found maybe two to three apiece, yet others found none at all. At the end of our hunt, we combined and turned in our catch, which the teachers merrily divided among themselves.

Whenever the teachers had misunderstandings among themselves, we students gloated and loved to witness the exchanges. In the first place, their quarrels disrupted our lessons, much to our delight. Naturally, no written lessons meant less opportunities for doling out corporal punishment for the slightest of errors. Secondly, it gave us such pleasure to watch two teachers go at each other. We had our wish come true one morning during our first period gardening class, which we always held in the school's garden. We had just recently turned the soil, prepared with neatly cultivated rows of planting beds. We discovered in the beds some groundnuts not fully harvested from the previous year's crop. These were the remnant crops which Mr. Ségun Adéníyí had been busy gathering as soon as he entered the garden when Mr. Òdúsòtè entered. Assistant Headmaster was the school's senior gardening instructor even though the other teachers also assisted him in teaching the fundamentals of horticulture.

Mr. 'Odibos' Òdúsòtè was in the garden and had caught Ségun stepping on our freshly cultivated, raised beds. He called Ségun's attention to the beds he was trampling, angrily of course. And what did the partridge do but screech discordantly?

"You see that the pupils had just cultivated those beds, and what do you do but walk on them? What a spoiler you are! Don't you use your eyes? A teacher worthy of the name 'teacher' ought to behave responsibly like one – like a gentleman."

"Excuse me; are you speaking to me in that rude tone of voice?" Ségun asked.

Mr. Òdúsòtè was furious.

"Yes, indeed, I am. Would you kindly get off the planting beds, unless perhaps you are deaf and didn't hear me?"

"I think you must be drunk or mad. You must be losing your mind, speaking to me like that," Ségun returned.

"Do you know who it is that's speaking to you?" Òdúsòtè asked, his tone laced with disbelief at Ségun's blatant disrespect.

"You bet I know who is speaking. It's hopeless, senile Òdúsòtè," Ségun replied, goading Òdúsòtè.

"Are you aware that it is the Assistant Headmaster and Director of Horticulture to whom you are speaking? Òdúsòtè reminded him.

"Buzz off, you bumbling fool! Who cares if you are assistant to God?" Ségun pushed.

"You are a complete idiot. Get the hell out of my garden at once. Get out!" Òdúsòtè spat contemptuously.

"Excuse me, *your* garden? *Your* garden, eh? Let me tell you something, *your* land does not extend this far. I'll tell you whose garden this is. The land here on which I stand is the property of the Methodist Presbytery," Ségun mocked and sneered.

"If you don't get off at once, I will have the pupils carry you out this instant," Òdúsòtè threatened.

By now Òdúsòtè's eyes were bloodshot with rage, his voice was trembling. Ségun laughed nervously again.

"I suppose the day salt seeks to lose its flavoring power is the day it yearns for a bath. Your day of ridicule has dawned today," Ségun shot back.

Òdúsòtè summoned about six bouncers and ordered them to throw Ségun out of the garden. The problem was no laughing matter. As they say, 'the king sends one on an errand, but the river is overflowing, preventing the messenger from crossing; yet, there's no choice; deliver the message the messenger must!' Clearly, the matter was a case of the messenger getting caught between a rock and a hard place. The poor messenger bouncers just stood rooted to the spot, staring at Ségun but not daring to lay a finger on him. Not surprisingly, they were hamstrung because, to begin with, all the pupils loved Ségun. Secondly, we all knew Ségun would trounce Òdúsòtè if things were to come to a head and turn into an all-out brawl. If two teachers were itching to get into a tussle, we reasoned, who are we to try to stop them? They should go right ahead; we really could care less! When two stones crack a kernel, who cares which of the stones is on the bottom and which one ends up on top?

When Òdúsòtè saw that the bouncers were hesitant to carry out his orders, he turned on them, thrashing them for insubordination. The boys dispersed fast and stood aloof, watching from a safe enough distance. Then Òdúsòtè moved toward Ségun.

"Get out of here; get the hell out of here!" he screamed in his face, shoving him in the chest.

Now, Mr. Ségun was ticked off, and in turn, shoved Òdúsòtè back with such force that the man fell back and landed on his buttocks on to one of the cultivated beds in question. We all snickered with cupped hands, but still he heard us laughing.

'*Odibos*' was enraged. After he finally got back to his feet, he clobbered Ségun with the whip he had been holding all this time.

"Ah, please don't fight. Please stop the fighting, Sirs."

We all cried out loud, really only half-heartedly, not a single one of us making as much as a feeble effort or attempt to close in and break up the fight.

Ségun closed in on '*Odibos*' Òdúsòtè, landing an uppercut to his chin; '*Odibos*' grabbed his jaw, wincing with pain. Lifting his cane, he furiously rained lashes all over Ségun's head and shoulders. Now, truly enraged, Ségun released a torrent of fist blows all over Òdúsòtè's head and upper body. From our vantage point, even we felt dazed by the speed of Ségun's jabs and truly feared that Òdúsòtè might get badly hurt, maybe possibly get killed. Finally, the burly ones in our midst jumped between them to break up the fight after we saw just how Òdúsòtè had worn that one whip to shreds on Ségun's head and how Ségun, in turn, had busted Òdúsòtè's mouth and bashed and bloodied his entire face.

When the bouncers had separated the fighting teachers, we could tell by the way *Odibos* let himself be pulled and led away that he was truly exhausted. He was almost limp, simply far too spent from the brawl. Ségun, on the other hand, was still full of fight, bobbing and ducking, arms flailing, menacing, and ready to resume the assault anew.

All *Odibos* could manage from his corner was a feeble, face-saving bluster:

"You'd better warn him to watch himself before I hurt him badly. I'll lay a curse on this mad man's head."

"You wallow in nothing but self-deception. Don't kid yourself. *You* put a curse on me? I, in turn, will show you I come seasoned from the *Eagan* household. The potency of your curses notwithstanding, don't forget that other people's curses can just as well vanquish yours. You hear me?" Ségun countered, calling Òdúsòtè's bluff.

Odibos' clothes were all smeared with blood, and the whipping had torn Ségun's shirt to shreds. This particular fisticuff was rancorous. Frankly, we were delighted, in fact, quite entertained by it all. Given our well-deserved work stoppage, we stood about and hooted with glee. Both teachers left us to our own devices and headed toward the classrooms, escorted by two burly boys lest they lock horns anew. *Odibos* mouthed off a storm of invectives as he walked away.

We, the pupils, made much of our freedom from work and the usual castigations for a while in the garden before the school authorities summoned us back to the classroom. By then, we had had our fill of freshly harvested groundnuts and had played to our hearts' content. We had the opportunity to clamor at the top of our lungs like a noisy horde of weaver birds. How the quarrel was resolved, none of us knew, or cared. However, what we did notice was that the two teachers did not speak to each other for a very long time. For his part, *Odibos* no longer attended our music lessons since Ségun was the music master, and Ségun never again set foot in the school garden.

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